

Asian/Pacific American Heritage Month



Amy Tan

Amy Tan was born in Oakland, California. Both of her parents were Chinese immigrants. Her father, John Tan, was an electrical engineer and Baptist minister who came to America to escape the turmoil of the Chinese Civil War. The harrowing early life of her mother, Daisy, inspired Amy Tan's novel *The Kitchen God's Wife*. In China, Daisy had divorced an abusive husband but lost custody of her three daughters. She was forced to leave them behind when she escaped on the last boat to leave Shanghai before the Communist takeover in 1949. Her marriage to John Tan produced three children, Amy and her two brothers. Tragedy struck the Tan family when Amy's father and oldest brother both died of brain tumors within a year of each other. Mrs. Tan moved her surviving children to Switzerland, where Amy finished high school, but by this time mother and daughter were in constant conflict.

With partner, she started a business writing firm, providing speeches for salesmen and executives for large corporations. After a dispute with her partner, she became a full-time freelance writer. Amy Tan prospered as a business writer. After a few years in business for herself, she had saved enough money to buy a house for her mother. She and her husband lived well on their double income, but the harder Tan worked at her business, the more dissatisfied she became. The work had become a compulsive habit and she sought relief in creative efforts. She studied jazz piano, hoping to channel the musical training forced on her by her parents in childhood into a more personal expression. She also began to write fiction.

Her first story "Endgame," won her admission to the Squaw Valley writer's workshop taught by novelist Oakley Hall. The story appeared in *FM*, literary magazine, and was reprinted in *Seventeen*. A literary agent, Sandra Dijkstra, was impressed enough with Tan's second story "Waiting Between the Trees," to take her on as a client. Dijkstra encouraged Tan to complete an entire volume of stories.

Just as she was embarking on this new career, Tan's mother fell ill. Amy Tan promised herself that if her mother recovered, she would take her to China, to see the daughter who had been left behind almost forty years before. Mrs. Tan regained her health and mother and daughter departed for China in 1987. The trip was a revelation for Tan. It gave her a new perspective on her often-difficult relationship with her mother, and inspired her to complete the book of stories she had promised her agent.

On the basis of the completed chapters and a synopsis of the others, Dijkstra found a publisher for the book, now called ***The Joy Luck Club***. With a \$50,000 advance from G.P. Putnam's Sons, Tan quit business writing and finished her book in a little more than four months.

Upon its publication in 1989, Tan's book won enthusiastic reviews and spent eight months on the New York Times best-seller list. paperback rights sold for \$1.23 million. The book has been translated in 17 languages, including Chinese. Her subsequent novel, *The Kitchen God's Wife* (1991) confirmed her reputation and enjoyed excellent sales. Since then Amy Tan has published two books for children, *The Moon Lady* and *The Chinese Siamese Cat* and another novel *The Hundred Secret Senses*.